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PRESIDENT ORDERS MOSCOW'S MISSIONS TO U.N. REDUCED

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UNITED NATIONS, N.Y., March 7 — The Reagan Administration ordered the Soviet, Ukrainian and Byelorussian Missions to the United Nations today to reduce their personnel by 38 percent, accusing them of espionage and calling the size of the missions "a threat to national security."

The unexpected announcement, which came in an official statement from the United States Mission to the United Nations, said the permanently assigned staffs would be cut from a total of 275 to 170 by April 1, 1988.

The reduction will take place in four stages of equal numbers. By October of this year, when the first phase is to be completed, the three missions will be allowed to have no more than 218 to 243 permanent staff members.

'Long Been Concerned'

Calls to the Soviet Mission to the United Nations were not returned. Vladimir Sokolovsky, the first secretary at the Byelorussian Mission, said, "I have not had time to read it."

The American announcement said, "The United States Government has long been concerned about the unreasonably large size of the Soviet U.N. missions."

Calling the Soviet missions larger than the next two largest missions combined, it added: "The current size of the Soviet U.N. missions is not warranted by the staffing needs for official U.N. business. Moreover, it poses a threat to national security."

'Inappropriate Activities'

The statement added, "Over the years, the United States Government has made clear to the Soviet authorities its concern that Soviet U.N. missions personnel have engaged in inappropriate activities" and that they "unfortunately have continued to engage in activities unrelated to U.N. business, including espionage."

The Byelorussian and Ukrainian Missions, which have functioned as independent members of the United Nations since its founding in 1945 under an arrangement worked out at the Yalta conference, will be allowed no more than 10 permanent staff members.

Their staffs operate out of the Soviet Mission, and delegates and their families live in the Soviet housing complex in Riverdale. They invariably vote with the Soviet Union in the General Assembly and on committees.

The American deputy chief delegate, Herbert S. Okun, today delivered a copy of a letter informing the Soviet

Union of the Administration's decision to Vasily Safronchuk, the acting chief Soviet delegate to the United Nations. They met for almost an hour, in what one spokesman from the United States Mission called "a very serious and sober discussion of the matter."

Mr. Okun also delivered a copy of the same letter to Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. "Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar has asked the legal counsel of the United Nations to investigate the United States decision to determine whether the United States is in conformity with the headquarters agreement," his spokesman, François Giulliani, said.

Even after the total reduction in their staffs, the Soviet, Byelorussian and Ukrainian Missions will still have the largest representation of any country, a spokesman at the United States Mission said. "We're not stripping them," she said. "They're just coming down to normal size."

The next largest mission is the American Mission, with 126 officials, followed by the Chinese, with 116.

No other mission will be affected by the reduction, the United States spokesman said.

The official message called the ac-

tion "a reasonable, prudent step" that was taken "after careful consideration." It added, "We do not believe this move need have a negative impact on our bilateral relations."

A State Department spokesman said today that if the Soviet Union retaliated for this decision, the United States would reciprocate. "We do not expect this will become an issue in bilateral relations, because the Soviets already have many more than we do," he said. "If the Soviets retaliate, we are prepared to reciprocate."

The Reagan Administration has been under considerable pressure from Congress to cut back the number of Soviet personnel working in the United States, especially in the last year, after a series of espionage cases in the United States.

In 1980, after Soviet forces swept into Afghanistan, the United States told the Soviet Union that it could have no more than 279 officials at its embassy in Washington and 41 at its consulate in San Francisco. Soviet personnel in the three missions to the United Nations and in the Secretariat were not included.

There are several bills pending in Congress to force the Russians to have no more personnel than the United States has in Moscow. The United States now has 200 officials in Moscow and 28 in Leningrad.